

London Borough of Redbridge Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Karen Malcolm / Joanna Heller
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Date of last inspection	5 June 2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The London Borough of Redbridge Private Fostering Arrangement is part of the Redbridge Children's Trust. The private fostering service provides care and accommodation for children and young people living within Redbridge who are no longer able to live with their families. Private Fostering Arrangements are not regulated services, they are private arrangements, but the local authority has functions and duties with regard to children that are privately fostered.

Summary

The purpose of this key announced inspection is to ensure the private fostering service safeguards and promotes the rights and welfare of children and young people. All seven of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering were examined. This was in relation to two of the Every Child Matters outcome areas. This is the first inspection undertaken by Ofsted, but in 2006 Redbridge's Local Authority Fostering Arrangements were inspected by The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), now renamed The Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Private fostering is a new area of work and substantial time has been spent raising awareness and building links across various council departments. Children and young people benefit from good health outcomes. Great efforts are made to address children and young people attending school and meeting their emotional and physical needs. The outcome areas Staying Safe and Organisation have been judged to be inadequate - notice to improve at this inspection. The local authority is fully aware of the areas for further improvement. The local authority has demonstrated some commitment to securing positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people. However, the service could not clearly demonstrate how the management structure supports children and young people safely under the private fostering arrangement.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection under The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 11 recommendations were made, of which six have been met. Children and young people can now access the local authority's looked after children website. All privately fostered children and carers now have a named social worker assigned to them. The local authority now has an interpreter service to support those children, carers and parents whose first language is not English and new publication leaflets have been produced.

The other recommendations have not been met. These relate to staff training, updating the Statement of Purpose, having accessible information for private foster carers on financial support and other matters and reviewing the system to ensure a decision maker is appointed. These recommendations have been re-worded and restated in this report.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

There are currently 13 private fostering arrangements known to the London Borough of Redbridge. The majority of children and young people placed are asylum seeking young people. All notifications are received via the local authority's Child Protection Assessment team (CPAT). However, no statistical information is maintained by the service on the number of notifications received in relation to private fostering. The local authority has raised awareness of private fostering amongst staff and the local community through advertising in local publications, leaflets and having a link on the main local authority website. The publication materials identify who to contact to respond to notifications and to give advice about other aspects of private fostering arrangements. However, the materials produced are not available in different languages or other formats to support the culturally diverse groups of private foster carers, parents and the community at large. Privately fostered children and young people do have their needs assessed and their welfare monitored appropriately by trained and experienced social workers. However, there is some inconsistency with regards to the appropriate action being taken on the receipt of a notification and subsequent visits being carried out. These have not consistently been managed or undertaken in accordance with the Regulations. The local authority does not have a policy or procedures in place for responding to disqualifications, imposing requirements and how individuals can appeal against the decision made.

A part of the overall assessment is that appropriate checks of all adults living in the home with the child or young person are undertaken once a notification is received. However, one check had not been undertaken until 11 months after the date of the initial notification being received. Some files had no evidences of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and health declaration forms being received. Further checks, such as the assessment of a new member of a household, had not been carried out to ensure that young people remained safe.

Children and young people's wishes and feelings are sought at each visit made by the allocated social worker. The local authority does have access to an interpreter service to assist those children and young people whose first language is not English. However, this service is not always accessed appropriately and there is clear evidence that visits are made where a member of the privately fostered family has interpreted on behalf of the social worker. Children and young people's overall health and educational needs are met by the carers. Carers surveyed stated that they are well supported by the service and have no complaints.

The majority of the children or young people placed do not have their birth families based within the UK. Therefore contact arrangements are difficult to support, which the local authority is very aware of, but additional support is given to those children and young people.

The local authority does give private foster carers advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of the child or young person being cared for. This information is given verbally at the initial visit or through the advice centre and is documented on file. However, the service could not clearly demonstrate how this process is being supported after the initial assessment has been completed, for instance, if a carer needs additional information or advice on financial assistance. Each private foster carer knows who is the child's allocated social worker. This is an improvement from the last inspection.

The majority of the parents of privately fostered children or young people placed do not live within the borough, therefore the need to support has not been a concern. However, there are no clear processes in place as to how this need would be supported if parents of privately fostered children or young people do live within the borough.

Privately fostered children and young people are able to access information and support when required, but how this is met was not clearly demonstrated by the service. Young people surveyed feel well cared for and safe in their private foster placements, and are seen regularly by their social worker, who they feel listens to them and takes notice of their opinions.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The local authority has a written statement setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The local authority is aware that this statement does not currently include all the matters as set out in National Minimum Standard 1.2. Policies and procedures required for the smooth running of the service are not in place. Therefore, the service could not be fully assessed, to ensure that the correct procedures are being followed, including support and guidance for staff and private foster carers on training and development needs. Additional to this, there are no procedures in place for responding to disqualification and imposing requirements and how individuals can appeal against decisions made.

The local authority has not produced a written report to include an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within the area. Prior to the inspection the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), Practice Development Manager confirmed in writing that there have been no child protection enquiries that have been undertaken in relation to a privately fostered child, a private foster carer or other child in the household of a private foster carer.

There is no clear management structure, as to who is designated to sign-off the decision about the overall suitability of an arrangement to privately foster. Also, it was unclear as to who is the individual responsible for the day to day management of the private fostering service, although the Statement of Purpose states that the Head of Service is the person to contact, but in further discussion this still remains unclear. Staff interviewed were also uncertain of their roles and responsibilities within the service, to ensure that the work is carried out effectively.

The local authority does not keep an up to date list of the numbers of privately fostered children and private foster carers living within the local authority's area. Records are updated yearly, however, day to day changes are not instantly updated, to ensure an accurate record is maintained. At present the local authority does not have a named person responsible for managing this process.

There is no clear system in place for recording the numbers and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering or the number of young people who have reached the age of 16 or who have moved out of the area to another borough. Notifications are received by the local authority's Child Protection Assessment Team (CPAT) and then are passed on to the fostering and adoption team.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Evidence supports a commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. There is still room for improvement with regards to promoting publications in other languages and formats and utilising the interpreting service appropriately.

Separate records for private fostered children and carers were well organised and appropriately stored. Each file contained the information required in National Minimum Standards 7.2 and 7.3.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- update the Statement of Purpose to reflect all guidance as set out in NMS 1. (NMS 1)
- review the staffing and management structure to include each person's roles and responsibilities. (NMS 1)
- update the current system for analysing statistical data, to ensure that records clearly show the numbers and nature of enquires received, the current numbers of privately fostered carers and children living within the borough and any changes. (NMS 7)
- assign a named person to sign-off the decisions about the overall suitability of an arrangement to privately foster. (NMS 7)
- produce clear strategic guidance and operational policies and procedures for the service, which should include disqualification, the appeal process and support for carers and parents. (NMS 7)
- provide appropriate training for all staff within the service and private and prospective foster carers. (NMS 1)
- provide a written report annually which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work relating to privately fostered children within its area. (NMS 7)
- update the publication leaflets and produce them in different languages and formats. (NMS 2)
- review visits made to the privately fostered child to comply with Regulation 8. (NMS 2)

- undertake Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and other checks of each members of private fostering household over the age of 18 and a clear system should be in place as to how this is monitored and reviewed. (NMS 3)
- introduce a clear system to support parents of privately fostered children. (NMS 5)
- produce written information to be given to private foster carers about financial support that may be available to them. (NMS 4)